



State Capitol | Lansing, Michigan 48913

PH (517) 373.2413 | FAX (517) 373.5144

www.senate.michigan.gov/gop/senator/allen/

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Contact: James Callahan
1-866-525-5637

Snowmobile trail options added with new Sen. Allen law

LANSING – Legislation designed to create options for Michigan’s snowmobile trail system, including the area between Gaylord and Cheboygan, was signed into law, said Sen. Jason Allen.

“This new law creates exciting opportunities for additional snowmobile trails throughout the state,” said Allen, R- Traverse City, sponsor of Senate Bill 161. “This is great news for the northern Michigan businesses that rely heavily on the dollars spent by snowmobile enthusiasts.”

Public Act 307 of 2005 allows snowmobiles to be operated within the right-of-way limited access highways, if a trail is approved through a joint agreement by the Michigan Department of Transportation and the Department of Natural Resources. The two departments would be in charge of establishing the details of the trail to ensure appropriate safety issues are addressed.

During the 2003-2004 legislative session, Allen introduced SB 1329, an earlier version of SB 161, after a northern Michigan task force studying how to establish a snowmobile trail between Gaylord and Cheboygan proposed this alternative. Unfortunately, SB 1329 was vetoed by the governor.

Under a compromise reached with the Executive Office, SB 161 would allow MDOT to prohibit snowmobile use on areas of non-limited access state highway right-of-ways if snowmobile use in that area poses a specific threat to public safety. Prior to closing a right-of-way, MDOT will be required to implement an alternate route that maintains access to businesses that rely on snowmobile-based commerce.

“Snowmobiling has an extremely significant impact on northern Michigan’s winter tourism industry,” Allen said. “I’m glad to see this important piece of legislation become law.”

With almost 400,000 registered snowmobiles, the industry contributes more than \$1 billion to the state’s economy every year. Michigan has more than 6,000 miles of groomed trails offering exciting terrain of forest and field to both residents and visitors.

Senate Bill 161 passed the Senate unanimously and passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 103-0.

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